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PERCEPTIONS OF HOW NEGATIVE NURSING IMAGE IMPACTS ON NURSING CARE AND NURSING COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT

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Nursing image has a significant influence on the development of nursing competency and quality of nursing care. However, it is relatively unknown how negative nursing image effects on these aspects in Vietnam. The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of the impacts of negative nursing image on nurses' competency development and quality of nursing care in clinical settings. A qualitative study, ethnographic method was used which comprised of the participant-observation, in-depth interview, and focus group discussion. Purposeful sampling of 41 participants, who were nurses employing in Cho Ray hospital, Vietnam and other significant stakeholders. Content analysis was used for analyzing the data. The findings from this study indicated that the negative public nursing image was found to be a critical factor influencing the quality of nursing care and nursing competency development among nurses. Most of the research participants perceived that a negative nursing image has a negative impact on the quality of nursing care and the development of nursing competency. A negative attitude of society toward nursing causes stress, frustration, less concentration, and negative feelings among nurses and results to medical errors, patient safety, the quality of care and patient satisfaction as well as impedes nurses' competency development. It is suggested that in order to promoting nurses' competency and quality of nursing care, enhancing public image of nursing professional towards positively is needed.

Keywords: Nursing Image, Nursing Competency, Qualitative Design, Vietnam

1. INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization [WHO] (2006) considers that nurses constitute the backbone of the healthcare system in all countries. Competency of nurses in fact is vital to safe nursing practice as well as essential component to drive quality of nursing services; a lack of competency among nurses will therefore have substantial negative effects on nursing care and patient outcomes. However, nursing is a profession that has long been troubled with its public image. The public has a stereotypical view of nursing, in which nurses may be regarded as less intelligent than doctors, dependent on doctors, powerless and underpaid (Hoeve et al., 2014, Tang et al. 1999).

According to the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, image is defined as 'a picture in your mind or an idea of how someone or something is'. What's more, it is how people, their peers, the general public and, in nursing's case, patients, their families and supervisors perceive another person, group or phenomenon. How a person presents in public and private, their appearance, communication style and conduct, and their associates, are all referents in the definition

of image (Roseann, 2000). Nursing image thusly is conveyed by how nurses present themselves in every setting, from the classroom, to clinics, to professional meetings and to the workplace (National Students' Nurses Association 2009–2010). Nurses therefore reveal a professional image to others observing them, by their appearance and actions, which may or may not be within a professional context (Stanley, 2004).

Nursing image is closely tied to the nurse's role and identity, and differs depending on the cultural group. In professional contexts, nursing tends to convey a professional image, one that motivates trust and expectations for accountability (Tzeng 2006). Positive images reflect high-quality nursing care, recognized by nurses and other groups for the difference it makes to patient wellbeing, and will contribute to empowerment of the profession (Ulmer 2000). Maintaining an intra-professional positive image is significant in attracting new recruits to the profession, contributing to morale and job satisfaction, and influencing social status, economic value and career development (Takase et al. 2006).

According to the International of Nursing Council [ICN] "Nursing encompasses autonomous and collaborative care of individuals of all ages, families, groups and communities, sick or well and in all settings. Nursing includes the promotion of health, prevention of illness, and the care of ill, disabled and dying people. Advocacy, promotion of a safe environment, research, participation in shaping health policy and in patient and health system management, and education are also key nursing roles." (ICN, 2002). Nursing is a 24-hour occupational health service that effects changes in the biological, social and psychological environment of the patient to enhance health. The nature of nursing work requires nurses to become deeply involved in human behavior with sympathy, understanding, compassion and competence. ICN firmly believes that violence in the health workplace threatens the delivery of effective patient services and, therefore, patient safety. If quality care is to be provided, nursing personnel must be ensured a safe work environment and respectful treatment (ICN, 2006).

One of the challenges of Vietnamese nursing is negative attitude of society toward nursing profession. According Jones and colleagues (2000), nursing profession in Vietnam has a low status ascribed by the public. The Ministry of Health of Vietnam [MoH] (2012) also viewed the position and image of nurses in Vietnamese society has changed a little but still not clear. These were caused by several factors, such as nursing practice in Vietnam has been greatly influenced by many years of war; nursing activities therefore were often carried out by people trained mainly in basic first-aid measures at the time of these periods. This practice has created a lasting legacy of ambiguity concerning the role of nurses and those who are qualified to practice nursing. What's more, a high percentage of nurses are female, who are generally less worth and less education compared to men in Vietnam. On The other hands, most of nurses in Vietnam have earned secondary level of nursing education and less (MoH, 2012) and nursing education has been controlled by the physicians because of lack of nursing professional experts (John et al., 2000). Nurses thusly depend on physicians' diagnosis and orders; they practice in clinical settings as doers to undertake the orders without critical questions.

Meanwhile there have been many studies on the public image of nurses worldwide; there is a lack of research on how nurses and other stakeholder actually perceive the negative public image of nursing profession impact on quality of nursing care and nursing competency development in Vietnam. There has also been a lack of information regarding how nurses interpret their public image based on their self-image, and how this interpretation affects their competency development as well as nursing care quality.

The purposes of this study were to investigate how nurses and other stakeholders perceive nurses' public image and to explore perceptions of how the poor nursing image affected nurses' competency development and nursing care in clinical settings in Vietnam. The findings from this study would provide valuable information and understanding of perceptions among nurses and other stakeholders concerning the impacts of undesirable image of nursing professional on the development of nurses' competency as well as quality of nursing services.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research approach was selected in this study by allowing the voice of Vietnamese nurses to be heard, thusly providing opportunity to actually truly discover how stakeholders perceive negative public nursing image affect competency development and nurses' performants. This study was conducted within the context of Cho Ray hospital, one of the biggest national general hospitals in Vietnam which is located in the center of Ho Chi Minh City. There were 41 participants, 8 males and 13 females, participated in the study. The nurses who directly provided nursing care to patients were considered as key informants and other general informants included nurse managers, administrators, teachers, medical doctors, medical technicians, and patients and their relatives.

In order to recruit enough informants, clinical setting visits and purposive sampling were applied to enroll participants who met inclusion criteria. Ethical approval was both obtained from the Khon Kaen University Ethics Committee in Human Research and the Research Division of Cho Ray hospital. Data collection included in-depth interview and focus group discussion. Content analysis was applied for analyzing data.

3. FINDINGS

This paper presents findings from the qualitative data, participant-observation, in-depth interview and focus group discussion, relating to the participants perceived impacts of negative nursing image on nursing care and competency development among nurses practicing in clinical settings.

Most of participants in this study thought that people nowadays still view nursing in a negative ways. Such as, people in the community view nurses are as physicians' assistants with low knowledge and less worth; people are not recognize and respect nurses. In other words, as assumed by the studied participants, there was a negative nursing image perceived from the public and it had a critical negative impact on the development of nursing competency as well as nursing care quality and patient outcomes. The participants perceived that negative attitudes of society toward nursing cause stress, frustration, less concentration, and negative feelings among nurses and results to medical errors, patient safety, the quality of care and patient satisfaction. The consequences of negative nursing image go far beyond nurses' job satisfaction and morale, in turn, has a negative impact on patients' outcomes. This will influence on nurses all physical, psychological and social aspects and all these effects have a reciprocally negative influence on the development of competency among nurses and clinical outcomes.

3.1. Impact on nurses' health

The poor nursing image, as the respondents' view, is harmful not only to nurses' physical but also mental health. Nurses might be tired or lose of energy because of sadness, stress and frustration. The unexpected accidents are also easily happened during nurses' performants in taking care of their patients, such as hand stinging.

One female interviewed nurse participant shared: “You know, whenever I think of our (nurses’) position, I am so sad and disappointed. Why people cannot understand us (nurses) while we take care of them (clients) on our best... yes, so poor nursing image now. It (negative nursing image) harms my physical health a lot and psychological also. Why? I feel so tired, as I lose all my energies, as I am starving”. This view is in line with a head nurse participant’s perception: “So poor for nurses. We do over night to take care for patients. However, what do they think about us? Poor,... just as a servant. This influences on nurses’ health. ...it causes mistakes; this causes accident for nurses during doing medical techniques because of less of concentration, such as is stung in hand by a needle”.

In another way, a medical doctor interview participant expressed her feeling: “Yes, people in our society view nurses in a very negative way. So poor, you see, so poor for them (nurses). Many time patients and even... family members get angry with nurses irrationally....as you know, the negative attitudes of public toward nursing, of course, has a negative consequence on nurse’ health, such as physical or psychological aspects”. The effects of a poor nursing image on nurses’ psychology aspect had also been expressed: “I am stressful. Many times I cry. I become a nurse because I love this profession. I used to view nurses as angels in a beautiful white blue... however, people don’t think like us. Patients and family members don’t respect us. They don’t accept our effort. Even other health care professionals, such as medical doctors, they value us so poor, lower than others (other professionals). Their perceptions have a very strongly effect on my life, in a bad way. I feel disappointed. I want to quit my job...”.

Not only disturb on nurses’ physical and psychological aspects, undesirable nursing image also hurts nurses in social area. The participants perceived that position of nurses in community and society is quite low because of low nursing image. Public is not value nursing as a profession as other disciplines and nurses are not as professionals as others. The participants perceived that patients and family members just put their respectability on the doctors because doctors are the one who treats them while nurses just as doctors’ assistants and need to perform according to doctors’ orders and these are nurses’ tasks. The low position or poor image of nurses’ causes nurses feel that they are less powers and values. A female nurse director mentioned: “Do you know? Many nurses would like to quit job. Not because of they are not interested in nursing, they intend to do this because they feel guilty about their career. Very low position, low values, less worth. And in fact, there was some nurses changed their job to other. And he (the nurse who changed the job) doesn’t want to recognize as he used to be a nurse. After changing, he has never mentioned he used to be a nurse. He wants to forget nursing forever”.

The female nurse participant expressed in a frustration emotion: “You see, after a night shift, I was not sleep all night. Yes, of course! Because there were many patients that needed us take care for, because Cho Ray hospital is so busy with many patients and in severe conditions. I was starving after that night shift. I then went to a hairdressing salon to relax. What happened? What happened? There were some women there; they discussed some things relevant to nurses. They used very bad words to mention about nurses. They called us (nurses) “Con y tá”- the worst way in Vietnamese when mention for someone is not worth-..... And then they asked me “what is your job?”. I answered them “I am a worker”...I could not recognize I am a nurse...”. She stopped to talk and cried. In the same perception, a male interview informant wished: “I wish that when we are talking about nursing, about our profession, we are proud of.... Or if someone asks me: ‘what is your job?’ I would be very proud to answer: ‘I am a nurse’. I wish so, I wish so”.

The findings were also supported by the data gathered from focus group discussion session. A member of focus group discussion complained: “I feel so tired and stressful...because of lack of respectfulness from others (community persons and physicians)...Meanwhile the patients’ family

relatives could argue nurses at any time without reason, yes, I understand them, because they were waiting for quite long time to receive the caring of; they do not dare to talk loudly with the physicians...however, this (unequal attitudes and behaviors of the patients relatives towards nurses and doctors) still causes me in distress”.

3.2. Impact on nursing competency development

The findings indicated that the negative attitudes of public toward nursing will impede the development of competency of nurses. The negative nursing image results to nurses' stress, frustration and less of motivation to improve their own competency.

“Many nurses don't want to study more. For what? Study for what? Just a nurse. Will be a nurse forever. Forever with low position, with low salary, with less worth and values” (stated the female nurse participant).

The low public image of nursing is a major concern for nurses and other stakeholders in this study as it was identified as a critical factor obstructed nurses' competency development. This causes nurses' feeling of losing motivation in enhancing their knowledge and skills. A nurse teacher indicated: “You see, most of nurses in Vietnam now are just earn secondary level in nursing. However, many of them don't want to study to upgrade their nursing level.... A lot of reasons. However, one of the important reasons is that the public view them as very poor image. It's so difficult for them (nurses) to improve their capacity when people view them as... you see... as ...low, low, and poor image”. Another director also indicated: “Poor nursing image will lead nurses feeling depressed. They will fall in disorientation in their life. They will lose the motivation to promote the competency”.

The knowledge and skills that a nurse has obtained during their nursing education programs in nursing school are not enough for them to take care their client effectively. To ensure the quality of nursing care, each nurse needs to continue improving their competency according to particular clinical setting requirements. Satisfaction with their job is a vital element encourages nurses engaging in continuing nursing competency. One patient's female family member interviewed participant shared her own view: “All nurses in Cho Ray hospital work so hard. Very hard! They forget eating, they forget taking care themselves. They just focus on taking care of patients. However, many patients, very crowded, most of patients in severe problems.... Because, if they are not in severe conditions they are not here now. So poor for nurses. They work so hard...like never finish performants. So difficult to them to serve all patients well”. She kept in shortly silence and then continued: “I understand them now. I sympathize with them. However, many patients and family members here hurry them (nurses) and express very negative attitudes toward them or even argue them. They (patients and care takers) behave like that will hurt nurses. They (nurses) will lose motivation to become good nurses because they have already done all their best and their effort. However, still cannot satisfy them (clients)”.

Number of nurses viewed that if people in community do not respect nursing profession, people do not respect nurses, nurses will not have motivation to promote their competency. A nurse participant expressed: “I am engaged in study continue to upgrade my nursing level as well as enhancing my competency in order to improve my performances. However, you see, there are many obstructions.... One thing (obstruction) is that the views and attitudes of people toward nursing are so poor. It (negative public attitude) impedes me to study. My husband told me that: do not study any more”. Another head nurse of the hospital also complained: “You see, encourage them (nurses) to study continuing is very difficult, because...you see, they work hard, have no time...and nursing

profession is not worth...people view nurses with a...low position...they do not have motivation to study”.

Besides the negative impacts, few of the participants believed that: “Sometimes, a negative image of nursing motivates us learning more to improve our competency in an effort of changing our image and values” (stated the focus group member).

3.3. Impact on quality of nursing care

The findings showed that the negative nursing image might result to medical errors, patient safety, patient satisfaction and quality of nursing care indirectly. To achieve an optimal goal in providing health care services, one of the significant requirements is health care human resources. Nurse force accounted for more than half of human resources in the health care system. Nurses feel dissatisfied in their job will negative affect on their performants that might cause an impairment of quality of care.

“Difficult for me to focus on my task if I feel uncomfortable in my job. You see, when public views me as ...what... as a.. ok..very low position, so poor image. Of course, ...for example, patients are not respect me although I have done all my best, I have spent all my energy to care for them, I have forgotten myself and my family because take care of them with receiving so low salary. I would like to ask you how can I take care of them well when I feel sad. How can I behave to them in a respectfully way? Of course, really difficult!” (stated the female nurse participant). In the same light of thought, a teacher participant worried: “when nurses feel unsatisfied in their job, patients, yes, patients will be the first class be received the disadvantages, because nurses cannot concentrate in their performants”.

Medical errors are also the consequence of nurses’ perceptions of poor image of nursing. As discussed, the negative nursing image results nurses feeling boring, frustration in their job. These cause nurses perform their tasks with a less concentration which is as a culprit causing medical errors and undesirable accidents. The nurse participants in the first focus group discussion session agreed that: “So dangerous! When we perform our nursing care without concentration, medical errors, accidents happen certainly. Not safe for patients. You might provide wrong medication to patients. You might not recognize patients’ status changes or whatever”.

Being disrespectful among nurses undoubtedly roots a negative attitude of nurses toward patients which damage patients’ satisfaction and quality of care. A nurse participant explained: “People don’t respect nurses as they respect doctors. They just think doctors are most important to them. Doctors are all for them. And they ignore nurses. Patients and family members despise nurses. Nurses certainly ... forming negative thoughts gradually among nurses. Nurses might behave the same way to patients as things they have received. Yes, you cannot control their (nurses’) thoughts and attitudes toward patients. That...is as the way nurses send back the negative attitudes to the patients and community as they have received. Of course, this is unacceptable behavior and attitude; however, ...it (negative attitude and behavior) is unexpected formed gradually and difficult for nurses to control. These reduce patient satisfaction and comfort”.

In the same line, data from the participant-observations indicated that nurses would feel unsatisfied because of receiving less respectfulness and sympathy from others and this in turn might consequently affect the ways that nurses communicate and care for patients. In a night shift that the researcher lived at the field, there were three nurses in that shift who took care for more than seventy patients, including patients with severe conditions who were in the critical care room. All of nurses were very busy to care for the patients and responded to numerous of administrative tasks. There was a woman, she was patient’s relative, asked the nurse to do somethings for the patient

with a less respected attitude "...Now, you (the nurse) do or not...my family (the patient)....". The nurse then did her tasks in silence as she accepted the fate with resignation.

Some participants however indicated that nurses should consider themselves although there are still negative attitudes of public toward nursing. Instead of the negative thoughts or behaviors, nurses should effort to improve their own competency in order to provide nursing services to clients more effectively; to do so nurse professionals will receive a positive feedback from the community, as believed from the participants.

4. DISCUSSION

This study aims to investigate how nurses working in hospital in Vietnam and other stakeholders perceive nurses' public image and to explore perceptions of how the negative nursing image affected nurses' competency development and nursing care. The findings, as emerged from this study, indicate that nurses and other studied participants perceived that nursing profession has a negative image as perception by the community. The poor nursing image perceived by the community will cause the negative consequences of nursing competency development as well as reduce quality of nursing care. These findings are consistent with the findings from previous studies (Takase et al., 2006; Varaei et al., 2012) which indicated that nurses had a negative image and low social position. The participants in this study perceived that people in the community in Vietnam did not respect and value nurses. They just believed nurses are as medical doctors' assistants and nurses' tasks are perform medical doctors' orders simply.

The participants perceived that a negative attitude of public towards image of nursing is roots of obstruction of nursing competency development and reduce quality of nursing care. Perceptions of Vietnamese nurses and other stakeholders participating in this study regarding the impact of negative nursing image on nursing care are similar to nurses' in other countries (Morris-Thompson et al., 2011; Varaei et al., 2012). Negative nursing image causes stress, frustration, less concentration, and negative feelings among nurses and results to medical errors, patient safety, the quality of care and patient satisfaction. The findings indicated that the consequences of negative nursing image go far beyond nurses' job satisfaction and morale, in turn, have a negative impact on quality of nursing care. The undesirable attitude of people in the community will influence on nurses not only physical and psychological health but also social aspects among nurses. All these effects in turn have a reciprocally influence on the clinical outcomes.

The negative nursing image results to less of motivation to improve own competency among nurses. This causes nurses feeling to lose engagement and disorientation in enhancing their capabilities as well as leads to a negative attitude among nurses. Medical errors also are the consequence of nurses' perceptions of negative image of nursing profession. The negative nursing image as explained by the participants, results nurses feeling boring, frustration in their job. These cause nurses perform their tasks with a less concentration which is as a culprit causing medical errors and undesirable accidents. According to Takase et al. (2001), in Australia, revealed a discrepancy in the images of nursing between nurses and the public as perceived by nurses themselves, resulting in a nurse-environment mis-fit. This mis-fit was negatively correlated with the nurses' job satisfaction and performance as perceived by these nurses. The International Council of Nurses (2006) also firmly believes that violence in the health workplace threatens the delivery of effective patient services and, therefore, patient safety.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Nurses constitute the backbone of the healthcare system in all countries; a lack of job satisfaction and competency among nurses will therefore have substantial negative effects on nursing care and patient outcomes. The negative perception of public toward nursing image is a critical factor influencing the development of nursing competency as well as negative impact on patients' satisfaction and comfort, patients' safety and quality of care as well. To ensure the quality of care, nursing personnel must be ensured a safe work environment and respectful treatment. Strategies to improve the public image of nursing profession toward positively are needed.

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